

**“Research Findings about the HOPE VI Program and Case Management Services for  
Memphis Public Housing Residents”**

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*Academic Perspectives on the Future of Public Housing*

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Thank you for this opportunity to share my research findings about public housing programs in Memphis, TN. This testimony addresses the key questions posed in the invitation letter I received from Representative Maxine Waters on July 23<sup>rd</sup>, 2009.

**RESEARCH EXPERIENCE RELATED TO PUBLIC HOUSING**

I have been researching issues about public housing and resident self-sufficiency for more than a decade, throughout my graduate research at the State University of New York at Albany and subsequent research positions at The Urban Institute and the University of Memphis. (Please refer to my curriculum vita, submitted separately, for a detailed work history and list of presentations and publications.) I have interviewed several hundred residents in more than fifteen cities throughout the United States, talked with case managers, agency staff, and Executive Directors at many of those housing authorities, and observed a variety of programs serving public housing residents. In addition, I have analyzed quantitative administrative data about case management services and resident well-being from a range of data sources related to public housing programs.

My research has resulted in numerous presentations for practitioners and researchers, as well as several types of publications. First, my research on the Moving to Opportunity Demonstration Program in Chicago culminated in a doctoral dissertation (funded by a dissertation grant from the U.S. Department of Housing and Urban Development), along with two co-authored peer-reviewed journal articles and a book chapter. For six years, I worked at The Urban Institute on a number of multi-site research projects related to public housing and economic self-sufficiency, with an emphasis on the HOPE VI program. My

research, in collaboration with many others at The Urban Institute including Dr. Susan Popkin, focused on case management issues for original residents at public housing sites that were redeveloped as part of the HOPE VI program. Specifically, my area of research has focused on physical and mental health issues that act as barriers to employment and self-sufficiency for many of these residents. Our research from those projects resulted in numerous reports for HUD and foundations, along with the publication of several peer-reviewed journal articles.

For the last four years, I have been an Assistant Professor of Public and Nonprofit Administration at the University of Memphis. I have served as the lead Primary Investigator on evaluations of two HOPE VI grants in Memphis (Lamar Terrace and Dixie Homes), and have completed multi-year evaluations of two related job training programs funded by the Memphis Housing Authority. What I will address in this testimony is largely based on my current work in Memphis, but often in the context of my knowledge of other HOPE VI sites around the country.

I want to acknowledge the other researchers who have participated in the evaluations of HOPE VI in Memphis. The other lead researcher currently working on these HOPE VI projects with me is Dr. Stan Hyland, who is Head of the School of Urban Affairs and Public Policy at the University of Memphis. Dr. Hyland has worked with the Memphis Housing Authority and the city Division of Housing and Community Development for over twenty years, providing our work with a rich historical perspective on program changes locally. Dr. Phyllis Betts has contributed information about ongoing neighborhood redevelopment at the HOPE VI sites. Deidre Cullom, Jessica Denby, Jason Ellis, and Simisola Atolagbe have worked as research assistants on these projects, and have put in many hours conducting interviews, analyzing data, and drafting memos.

All of us work to provide rigorous, sound research findings, while also engaging with a wide range of local program stakeholders and participants so that the findings serve as more immediate feedback throughout the program, rather than merely assessing final program effectiveness. The staff at Memphis Housing Authority and others at related organizations have been generous with their time sharing data and explanations about their programs with us. I want to emphasize that this research is truly a team endeavor, while also pointing out that any conclusions and analysis presented here are ultimately my own.

## **PUBLIC HOUSING TRANSFORMATION IN MEMPHIS**

The HOPE VI program has had many goals, including: to improve the lives of public housing residents; to change neighborhoods so that there is lower poverty and unemployment, better housing quality, and a

growing municipal tax base; and, to spur redevelopment in surrounding areas. As might be expected, HOPE VI sites have achieved these goals to varying degrees in different periods of time. By definition, you can quickly reduce poverty in a single neighborhood by tearing down public housing and relocating hundreds of extremely poor households to other neighborhoods, but this is not the type of reduction in poverty that improves the lives of the original residents from those developments that are torn down. *An emphasis of my research, and also a goal of the housing authority and other stakeholders in Memphis, has been to examine HOPE VI in light of the changes it brings about for the original residents of the redeveloped sites.*

A key component of the Community and Supportive Services Program for HOPE VI is the commitment of social service support from community agencies to assist the residents in their economic self-sufficiency efforts. HUD requests letters of support as evidence of leverage that the housing authority can bring to the HOPE VI grant. However, few of these potential partners turn into effective services for the HOPE VI clients. (From what I know of other sites, this problem is not unique.) Some programs have budget cutbacks or staff changes, others are no longer able or interested in partnering, while other programs are no longer a priority from the perspective of the HOPE VI caseload. These letters of support in the grant application are supposed to form the framework for case management services, but effective partnerships take real commitment for integration in the service coordination and implementation. In the past few years, there has been a tremendous evolution in the case management system used at the four HOPE VI sites in Memphis based on these experiences with the first two HOPE VI projects.

For the first HOPE VI grant (LeMoyne Gardens), case management was conducted with a combination of staff from the housing authority and a small non-profit social service provider in that community. For the second grant (Hurt Village), case management was provided by a large local non-profit that worked with more program partners. While these grants were in compliance with the HOPE grants, they did not achieve the desired change of significant progress toward economic self-sufficiency that was the ultimate goal.

By the time the Memphis Housing Authority received its third and fourth HOPE VI grants (Lamar Terrace and Dixie Homes), there were local stakeholders, including the housing authority, who saw that there needed to be a more structured intensive and comprehensive case management system in place to help move households toward economic self-sufficiency. The most important stakeholder to become involved in the HOPE VI redevelopment efforts was the Women's Foundation for a Greater Memphis, who made a financial commitment to support the case management program (CSS). They made a

commitment to raise \$7,200,000, to fund the entire cost of CSS for both HOPE VI programs. In addition to the financial resources, the Women's Foundation also brought a tremendous amount of leverage locally, in terms of bringing other stakeholders to the table to figure out how to offer more coordinated case management services. Through the strength of their Board of Directors and their relationships throughout the city, they have continued to help build more a comprehensive coordinated social services program for HOPE VI residents.

During this time, Memphis Housing Authority identified Urban Strategies as a key partner in providing technical assistance to the CSS program for the Lamar Terrace and Dixie Homes HOPE VI residents. (Urban Strategies is an organization based in St. Louis that provides technical support to a number of HOPE VI sites throughout the country, helping them plan and coordinate community development programs.) In early summer 2006, Urban Strategies, the Memphis Housing Authority, and the Women's Foundation agreed to the creation of a new non-profit, called Memphis HOPE, which would be responsible for case management for HOPE VI residents. Since that time, Memphis HOPE has been created legally, and staffed since December 2006. They serve not only all the clients from these two HOPE VI grants, but also now serve the residents in other family public housing who receive case management as part of the ROSS grant (Resident Opportunities and Self-Sufficiency).

As the staff members of Memphis HOPE (the organization providing case management) have learned more about the individuals in their caseload, they have developed more strategic approaches to cultivate partnerships with programs that are more focused on the key barriers the clients were facing. They have continued to develop relationships with area public and nonprofit agencies to address specific issues among their clients. Several of these partnerships will be highlighted in subsequent sections of this written testimony.

### ***Brief Overview of Memphis Case Management Clients***

Housing authorities are required to provide case management to all households at the public housing development at the time of the HOPE VI award. As relocation occurs and time passes, the caseload generally dwindles a bit as some people choose not to receive assistance and others are terminated. Typically, at the end of a HOPE VI grant the caseload has diminished significantly. Memphis is not typical in this case. While the caseload diminished a bit in the first year or two following relocation, as reoccupancy grew nearer, more clients have opted to be a part of case management to be eligible to move back to the new development. As part of their lease agreement, households who move into public housing units at the new HOPE VI developments (even if they did not live in the original development)

are added to the Memphis HOPE caseload. Working age adults, who are not disabled, must be employed and actively receive case management to stay in the public housing unit at the new site.

The case management system serving the two active HOPE VI sites currently serve 529 households (196 from Lamar Terrace and 333 from Dixie Homes), with over 1200 people total. In addition, last year when the ROSS grant caseload was folded into the Memphis HOPE organization, more than 100 more households were added to the caseload. This model of moving toward comprehensive case management for the HOPE VI caseload is view locally as a start for building a larger anti-poverty initiative throughout the city, by the Executive Directors of both the Memphis Housing Authority and the Women’s Foundation for a Greater Memphis.

## **EFFECTIVE CASE MANAGEMENT APPROACHES**

The primary goal of case management in HOPE VI has been employment, with exemptions for seniors and those who have mental or physical disabilities (as defined by the Social Security Administration). Furthermore, employment is required for reoccupancy at many redeveloped HOPE VI sites. As such, helping adults find and keep jobs is the main emphasis of case management activities. One key lesson from much HOPE VI research has been that many adults need far more than a job training program or encouragement in order to get a job. Three key barriers are prevalent in Memphis, similar to other sites: low levels of education and literacy; health problems that are undiagnosed or do not meet federal guidelines as “disabilities”; and, a lack of personal, or accessible public, transportation. I will describe these three problems, along with the strategies that are being used in Memphis to address them.

### **Connecting public housing residents with employment opportunities**

A significant share of the adults in the HOPE VI caseload does not have even the minimum education needed to be able to obtain a job. Almost half of the HOPE VI caseload does not have either a high school diploma or a GED. Case managers have referred approximately 50 adults to GED programs, with 13 completing their GED. Case managers have reported that there is a significant portion of their clients who are functionally illiterate, so that referrals for a GED are not appropriate. They have tried referring clients to literacy programs, but report that many clients say they are too embarrassed to attend the programs and admit that they cannot read. Memphis HOPE has discussed trying to have such a program held at their office, in an attempt to enroll more adults in literacy classes.

Among those who do have basic literacy skills and a high school diploma or GED, Memphis HOPE has come up with creative programs and partners to help them find employment. First, they have tried three different types of programs to train clients to have the personal and leadership skills necessary to successfully apply for a job. The most successful of these programs has been a partnership with an African-American women's service organization, called The Links. With a small amount of programming money, the program is run largely by volunteers from The Links. The program has been offered once a year for the last three years, with classes offered over several weeks on a series of Saturday mornings. The volunteers are businesswomen from many facets of the community, who offer mentoring, encouragement, and practical advice during and in-between the scheduled meetings. There are presentations on setting personal goals, family goals, assessing physical and mental health, financial literacy, and self-esteem issues. Through this program, there have been many successful job placements each time the program has been offered, with clients reporting ongoing support from their mentor after starting the job. Many of these clients report that without this type of one-on-one mentoring they would not have found work.

In addition to the smaller mentoring programs they have developed, Memphis HOPE has facilitated partnerships with area employers. Three strategies are worth noting here.

- First, they have coupled the Section 3 jobs that employ clients in construction jobs at the redeveloping sites with a 14-week carpentry training program. Clients earn \$8.50 to \$10 an hour, while also attending training at night to increase their job skills. Six of the eight clients who started jobs this spring were not previously employed, so that is a particular success.
- Second, they worked with a major hospital (Methodist-LeBonheur) that is near both HOPE VI sites to secure a commitment that the hospital would hire 100 residents over five years. The arrangement designated that Memphis HOPE would screen residents and prepare them for the interview process, so that they would arrive prepared for the interview and employment. Among those hired to date, many of them earn above minimum wage and some with benefits. Similarly, Memphis HOPE worked with a casino in nearby Tunica, Mississippi (approximately 45 minutes away from Memphis) to train and hire residents. They continue to look for other nearby employers who will work specifically to hire HOPE VI residents.
- Third, recognizing the barriers faced by some of their clients with criminal records, the Employment Specialist from Memphis HOPE recently attended a training offered by the National Institute of Corrections to learn strategies for assisting clients with a criminal record, in order to improve their chances for finding and keeping jobs.

With the wide variety of methods used to train clients and help them obtain employment, there is still a significant share of the caseload that is not making progress toward a steady work career and economic self-sufficiency. While for some it is a matter of needing encouragement and help identifying specific opportunities, most have significant problems with low literacy and education levels, along with health problems and transportation barriers.

### **Connecting public housing residents with health services**

Public housing residents have worse overall physical and mental health than other poor people in the United States. The research I worked on at The Urban Institute demonstrated that one-third of the working-age residents at a sample of HOPE VI sites had been diagnosed with at least one of the following physical health problems - obesity, hypertension, diabetes, arthritis, and asthma. While these illnesses are not always a barrier to physical mobility and work, for many poor of these clients the illnesses are severe as a result of either bad management (not taking care of things that are within their control) or lack of access to proper health care and medicine. Additionally, from client feedback and our early evaluation recommendations, Memphis HOPE recognized that some residents experienced serious dental problems, particularly missing teeth, which had posed a barrier to getting jobs in the service sector. In response, they coordinated a dental screening for over 50 residents, but have yet to secure resources or a partnership that can address those problems.

Case managers at many different HOPE VI sites have described that many clients experience debilitating mental health problems (including those related to substance abuse, but also schizophrenia, bipolar disorder, clinical depression, and PTSD), which make finding and/or keeping a job difficult or impossible. Few clients are willing or able to follow through with the referrals to get the help they need for their illnesses. The case managers continue to discuss ways that they can increase the number of clients who get help for mental illness.

Memphis HOPE has worked to incorporate health information into many of the resident meetings and social events, beyond the typical “health fairs.” Also, one of the new developments planned space in the community building that can be used by medical providers, and hopes to continue to have a health focus in the new development for all residents.

## **Connecting residents in public housing with transportation**

Lack of access to effective transportation is a significant problem for public housing residents in Memphis. Memphis HOPE works to offer transportation assistance when necessary, primarily in the form of bus passes. Buses do not run frequently, and are not prevalent enough to offer convenient routes for many people to get to work or daily activities like shopping and doctors' visits. Some HOPE VI residents reported taking two hours to get to work by bus, when it would take less than 30 minutes by car. Many of the low-wage jobs at Federal Express and in the warehouse district have irregular hours late at night, which makes bus service rare or non-existent. Additionally, workers must walk home from the bus stop at late hours, often in unsafe neighborhoods. Residents who relocated from the HOPE VI developments moved to neighborhoods all over the city, with very few concentrating in one particular part of town, so advocating for some particular change in the bus system would not solve the problem for many people.

Memphis HOPE has worked with residents to solve transportation barriers to work, primarily by providing bus passes and by helping clients locate work that is easily accessible by public transportation. In addition, Memphis HOPE has worked to incorporate transportation into many of their events and programs. They often rent busses to pick up residents to attend job training programs or transport children to summer programs. They have spent thousands of dollars of their budget on transportation in this manner, in order to increase attendance by both adults and children. There have been on-going discussions to identify ways to help a few residents start a small business to offer transportation services for the community, but none have been implemented to date.

## **WORKING WITH LOCAL SCHOOLS AND YOUTH PROGRAMS**

While case management in the HOPE VI program is focused on working age adults, Memphis HOPE has made working with children and youth an increasing priority in recent years. Here, I will highlight three ways they are focusing on youth.

*First, Urban Strategies and Memphis HOPE have focused on first developing relationships with the two elementary schools that serve the HOPE VI areas that are currently being redeveloped.* Urban Strategies has experience working to reform local schools as part of HOPE VI redevelopments. They have had ongoing discussions with the principals at these schools, trying to identify what role Urban Strategies (as part of the Memphis HOPE, MHA, and Women's Foundation team) can play to help the school improve. In addition, the school near Dixie Homes is becoming an optional school for math and environmental

sciences, and will remain the neighborhood school for children at the new development. This school represents the largest share of the elementary school children in the Memphis HOPE caseload. Urban Strategies helps facilitate interaction between the school and case managers, to provide encouragement for parents to be engaged and make sure children attend. Most recently, Urban Strategies helped secure funding from the Women's Foundation for additional technology resources and for an after-school program. They also helped bring in employees from Methodist-LeBonheur Hospital to be guest speakers for school programs. Urban Strategies continues to meet with principals to help identify potential problems, and identify resources in the form of both money and relationships.

*Second, Memphis HOPE has made a very intentional effort to help children and youth find educational opportunities both during the school year and the summer.* They have conducted assessments with high school seniors for their post-graduation plans. For the last two summers, Memphis HOPE, with guidance from Urban Strategies, has planned and managed a summer employment program for youth, focused on technology skills and practical experience where the youth received a small stipend. This summer they worked to coordinate this program with funds from the American Recovery and Reinvestment Act to expand the program to 57 youth.

*Third, there is recognition that early childhood education needs to be addressed.* They are working to determine the most efficient way to screen children zero to three for speech, vision, hearing, and motor skills, so that they can refer them for assistance when necessary. Because the Community and Supportive Services funding officially expires at the end of 2010, there is not time to get new programs up and running in this cycle of funding and programming. At this point, the emphasis is on assessment and referral to existing services, with consideration for how this emphasis can be built into future similar projects.

## **POLICY RECOMMENDATIONS**

Comprehensive case management to address cumulative effects of systemic poverty is difficult, but critical if we are to create and implement programs that will help families move out of poverty. In thinking about the lessons from HOPE VI generally and Memphis' HOPE VI experience specifically, there are five issues that should be considered in crafting future federal policy about delivery of social services for public housing residents.

*First, identify a strong intermediary who will advocate throughout the local community for the needs of the client population and redeveloping neighborhood.* The involvement of the Women's Foundation

for a Greater Memphis has brought tremendous local support to HOPE VI redevelopment efforts. Local foundations have provided the funding for case management, with a commitment to see long-term change. These funders continually ask for evidence of change and plans for sustainability after the initial five-year case management period. Along with the pressure to see change, these funders bring their financial resources, volunteers, and political leverage to see local agencies participate across their normal boundaries. These stakeholders are essential to helping develop a system that will ultimately affect more than the HOPE VI caseload. Many in the local community view this model as an incubator for creative ideas about how to affect real change for these residents and the new HOPE VI community.

***Second, following on this first point, figure out how to work around the narrow program funding silos which make comprehensive case management and redevelopment efforts difficult.*** In Memphis, the local funding of case management through the efforts of the Women’s Foundation and the creation of a third-party non-profit (Memphis HOPE) has helped navigate some of the barriers that funding silos erect. As programmatic needs have arisen, the intermediary model has made it possible to react quickly by creating the programs that would best meet their clients’ needs. Memphis HOPE has been able to seed small mentoring employment programs and youth programs with funding flexibility as they identify these gaps for their caseload.

***Third, ensure that the program starts early to make plans to figure out how some level of case management will be sustainable for all HOPE VI clients, and specifically at the new mixed-income developments.*** The development of the Memphis HOPE model, and involvement of so much local support, is focused on creating a sustainable model, so that residents continue to receive some case management support after the initial five-year grant ends. This continuity is important for households who return to the new HOPE VI sites, but also to those who move to the private market using vouchers. Concern about the sustainability of case management services may affect the long-term viability of the newly developed HOPE VI sites. For example, at one of the earlier HOPE VI sites in Memphis that is now mostly redeveloped, property managers have reported that in the last year, since HOPE VI case management stopped, there has been an increase in the number of public housing residents losing their jobs and facing eviction. There is concern at that site and others that during the current economic environment more residents will lose employment and face similar circumstances.

This problem of evictions and turnover poses two problems. First, the issue for the long-term sustainability of the mixed-income communities is important from a business perspective, where evictions often mean a loss of income for the property owner. Second, residents who no longer receive the intensive case management that may have made their economic self-sufficiency possible because of the

support from the case manager may no longer have any support system when the CSS program ends. There is a need for on-going case management to help residents at the new developments stay in compliance with the work requirement, if the vision of creating mixed-income communities where public housing residents live is to be truly viable.

***Fourth, make sure that grantees are realistic from the start about the goals for their client population, by understanding the depth of literacy problems, mental and physical health problems, and other barriers to employment and self-sufficiency.*** HOPE VI grants request a resident needs assessment, but these often fail to provide a realistic portrait of the clients and feasible employment goals. Many HOPE VI grants have fallen short of their initially stated goals for how many clients will complete job training or obtain employment. In Memphis, though it was a struggle to move toward those goals initially, they have been quite intentional about using the resident tracking system (Tracking-at-a-Glance) to constantly assess their programmatic goals along with client needs, and figure out gaps in programming. Some of this learning-as-you-go is inevitable as case managers work with clients over a number of years, but after more than a decade of welfare-to-work era efforts, including HOPE VI case management, there is much better understanding about the types of issues to look for.

***Finally, encourage grant recipients to capitalize on creative approaches to identify local partnerships for client employment.*** Memphis HOPE has worked to create individual relationships with both large and small area employers to help open doors for clients who are qualified for work. By first assessing their education level and criminal background checks, Memphis HOPE can present a pool of job applications who have been pre-screened and who have a case management support team who will help them maintain employment. From a large hospital system to neighborhood technology businesses, these partnerships have been effective in linking clients to steady jobs. Additionally, carpentry classes are coupled with Section 3 jobs to give clients a chance for skill development while also earning money and getting on-the-job experience. Memphis HOPE has chosen to target employment opportunities where clients might move ahead and ultimately become economically self-sufficient, rather than merely an emphasis on quickly locating minimum-wage service sector jobs.

These recommendations suggest that both the ***system of service delivery*** and the ***content of those services*** should be examined to ensure that programs can be as efficient as possible in helping move poor individuals toward economic self-sufficiency, as appropriate. The testimony at this hearing and the broader research literature about employment and self-sufficiency efforts, aimed at public housing residents and other poor households, offers some of the key issues that must be re-examined so that new, more effective housing and community policies are developed.